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DISINFORMATION:

A willing suspension of disbelief

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This happened some ten years ago, when I was still a Soviet citizen, at a colloquium in Geneva organized by the Peace Research Society (International), or rather by its indefatigable president, Professor Walter Isard of the University of Pennsylvania. I had read a paper on "The Correlation of Forces from the Soviet Viewpoint." Briefly, its theme was this: as socialism was the wave of the future, it was right that it should become stronger and capitalism weaker. The balance of power should therefore inexorably tip toward socialism and against capitalism. This was the official Moscow line and it was even printed in the English-language edition (meant for foreign consumption) of the Soviet magazine *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn* (International Affairs), which is the semi-official publication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

When I had finished reading my paper, a West German professor told me tartly: "With your paper you have done the CIA's and the Pentagon's work." "You forgot to mention Pinochet," I reminded him. Smiling thinly, he said: "No indeed, why are you telling us all this?" "Because it's the Soviet point of view," I answered. "Yes, fine," he said in a conciliatory tone. "They think so and even put it down in writing. But you don't have to tell us that here, you should keep silent and talk about something else."

This was my first personal experience of Western self-disinformation. I realized then that there were people here who did not care to hear the truth about Soviet policies, but preferred to be disinformed.

I have no intention of criticizing or decrying the West for its weaknesses, as Solzhenitsyn is doing, but I believe it is useful to put down a few observations based on my

experiences in the West.

Soviet disinformation, the scale on which it is practiced, the way it is organized and spread through influential agents planted in the West are quite rightly the subject of discussion in the Western world where examples of such disinformation are cited. All this is correct. What we must realize though is that such disinformation would have scored only negligible successes without an insatiable desire in some Western circles to be deceived.

How, in fact, is Soviet disinformation concocted? It is the work, not of devilishly clever geniuses, but of bureaucrats in the Soviet political apparatus, ordinary state employees who are not brilliant and usually have very little experience of the West. Their concoctions are usually of such poor quality and the purposes of their tedious lies so transparent that you really have to want to believe them to take them seriously. One example of such disinformation currently peddled by Moscow holds that the CIA organized Mrs Gandhi's assassination by Sikh nationalists. Does this mean the military repression of the same Sikhs ordered by Mrs Gandhi was also organized by the CIA? Now, instead of asking oneself that question and ignoring such disinformation, we take it seriously.

With a monotony that puts you to sleep, Moscow keeps putting out one piece of disinformation after another, in which the villain is the CIA. It was the CIA that mounted the plot to assassinate the Pope. (For what purpose? To help the Polish communists?) It is the CIA which is behind the Red Brigades in Italy and the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany (so the CIA is bankrolling terrorist organizations that are attacking American interests in Europe?). It is the CIA that assassinated Kennedy (on whose orders? Kennedy's perhaps?). The devastating stupidity of such

assertions hits you between the eyes. And yet there are people in the West whose ridiculous anti-Americanism makes them ready to believe such stories.

It is beyond comprehension that Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou should peddle Moscow's version of the downing of the South Korean plane by the Soviets by declaring that the plane was, "as you know" on a "spying mission". The fact is, "as you know", it was a regular passenger flight, with 260 persons, including children, aboard, and it is hard to imagine how with all these people around the crew could have carried out espionage activities.

The plane was shot down without warning by a missile, judging by the Soviet fighter aircraft's recorded radio communications with ground control. There was in fact an American reconnaissance plane in the vicinity at the same time; it was different in size and shape from the Korean jumbo jet (so a mistake is ruled out). The Soviet fighters let that plane get away without firing a shot. Understandably so. The Soviets did not dare open fire on an American plane because of inevitable complications and took a gratuitously "firm" line by shooting down an unarmed plane belonging to a small country which had no diplomatic relations with the USSR.

So, there are no enigmas. The enigma in fact is the celerity with which certain Western media and even certain statesmen espouse the crude inventions of Moscow's bureaucrats. Just what is the reason for this curious hankering in certain Western circles to be hoodwinked by Moscow, to become its willing victims? Political masochism? That would be understandable among defeatists, but in most cases it is a rather widespread tendency in Western countries to see everything through ideological glasses and con-